CTED | Community, Trade and Economic Development

Emergency Food Assistance Program Provider Survey Report

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Prepared by Laura Pierce Consulting

CTED Emergency Food Assistance Program Staff
Susan Eichrodt, Program Manager
Mary Soderquist
Tim Bernthal

Report prepared by Laura Pierce

LAURA PIERCE
CONSULTING

Washington State Department of Community,
Trade & Economic Development
906 Columbia Street
PO Box 42525
Olympia, WA 98504

www.cted.wa.gov/cs

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About the Surveys

During March-April 2008, the Washington State Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), with encouragement from the EFAP Advisory Committee, conducted surveys of its contractors. This project was a follow-up to the feedback and capacity building project completed by the Washington Food Coalition in 2007 (that resulted in the publication of A Fork in the Road, Recipes for Success and Ingredients for Success). A subcommittee of the EFAP Advisory Board was convened to work with consultant Laura Pierce to develop the surveys. Three similar but tailored surveys were created targeted to food banks, tribal food voucher programs and distribution centers.

The main goals of the surveys were:

- To document unmet need.
- To collect information that might allow us to deduce what limiting factors are preventing people from getting the standard amount of food. Are limited hours of operation, transportation barriers, lack of space or equipment causing a bottleneck? If so, what investment by the State or others could alleviate the structural problem and allow for greater access?
- To gather baseline information and assess the capacity of food banks statewide in the following areas: facilities, equipment, staffing, food, hours of operation and transportation.
- To determine what additional capacity would be needed to achieve an established level of service.
- To provide useful data to State policymakers.

The standard of comparison used for the food bank survey was established through discussion with the EFAP Advisory Committee, and reads:

> *Everyone using the food bank will receive wholesome and nutritious food. The total amount of food each person receives over the course of a month will be enough food to last at least 4 days, 3 meals a day. Food choices for wholesome and nutritious meals will come from at least 4 of the 5 food groups each day for each person.*

Respondents were instructed to refer to this standard when answering questions that asked them about what additional capacity they need at their food bank. In other words, what additional resources would be needed, if any, to meet this standard?

The surveys were available to be filled out online via Survey Monkey, or a paper copy could be completed and mailed to the EFAP office for data entry. EFAP lead agencies were asked to distribute the

food bank survey and encourage participation. We are grateful to those leads who were proactive in assisting their area food banks in completing the surveys.

This survey was complemented by a customer service survey that was administered at participating food banks statewide during April and May of 2008. A summary of key learnings from this second set of data will be available in summer 2008.

Survey Response Rates and Methodology

231 of 328 EFAP-funded food banks participated in the survey, a 70% return rate. There is much to be learned from the data presented, and it is also important to remember that it is not a complete picture of Washington State emergency food providers. It is likely that smaller, low-capacity food banks were least able to participate, leading one to suspect that capacity in some areas may be overstated based on the sample here.

In addition, the survey was fairly demanding of respondents, requiring them to enter budget and staff data, service statistics, and make estimations regarding food sources and other issues. Unfortunately, many responses were incomplete, which again compromises our ability to rely on the data.

Despite these drawbacks, the data provides an important baseline of information about emergency food provider capacity, and indicates where investment may have the greatest impact in reducing hunger. As such, it is an important step in informing effective action to reduce hunger in Washington State.

Throughout the report, all percentages reflect the percentage of respondents answering a specific question. For example, if only 200 of 231 respondents answered a particular question, 100 yes answers is described as 50% yes. All percentages are rounded to the nearest percent, which could occasionally result in percentages summing to slightly more or less than 100%.

Food bank survey respondents were spread throughout the State, with 36 of 39 Washington State counties represented. 18.5% of respondents were located in King County. 35.6% of respondents were based in the Puget Sound counties of King, Pierce and Snohomish.

Although the number of respondents was smaller, response rates were comparable for the tribal food voucher programs and higher among the distribution centers. 24 of 32 tribal food voucher programs (75%) participated in the tribal food voucher program survey.

16 of 17 EFAP-funded distribution centers (94%) participated in the distribution center survey. These distribution centers are spread throughout the state and serve all 39 Washington State counties.

More than 100 survey respondents offered additional comments at the end of the survey. A sampling of these comments is provided in related sections throughout the report, in italics, to illustrate how the organizations are addressing the various challenges they face.

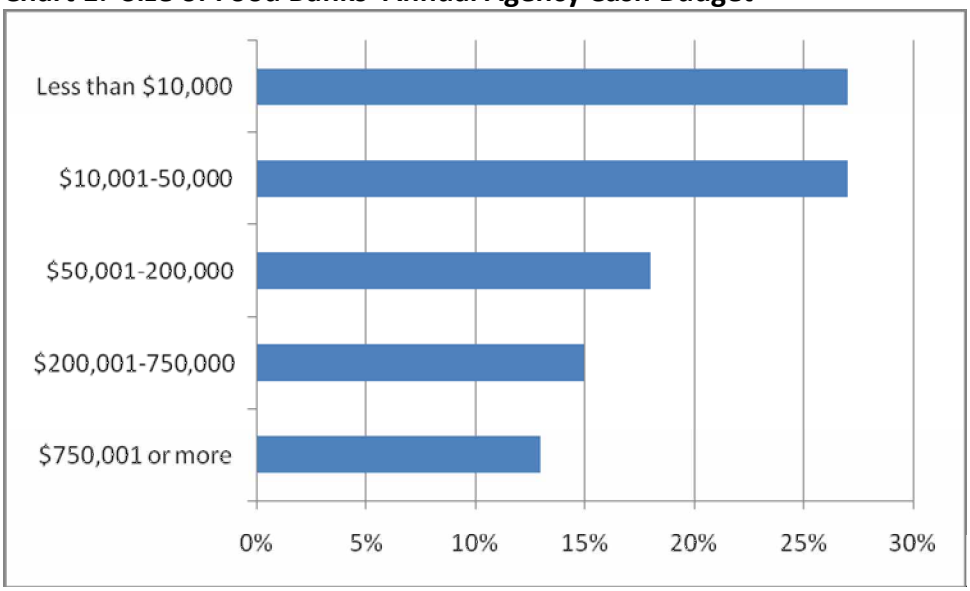
Food Bank Provider Survey Results

Program size and scope

Budget information provided indicates that the majority (54%) of food bank agencies are small, with annual budgets less than $50,000. Half of these small agencies (27%) are extremely small, with annual cash budgets under $10,000.

In spite of their small size, these food banks are serving large number of customers. 44 of 51 very small food banks provided estimates of the number of pounds of food distributed. These 44 food banks distributed an average of approximately 90,000 pounds each last year, ranging from a low of about 19,000 to a high of 350,000 pounds.

Chart 1: Size of Food Banks' Annual Agency Cash Budget



Facilities and Storage

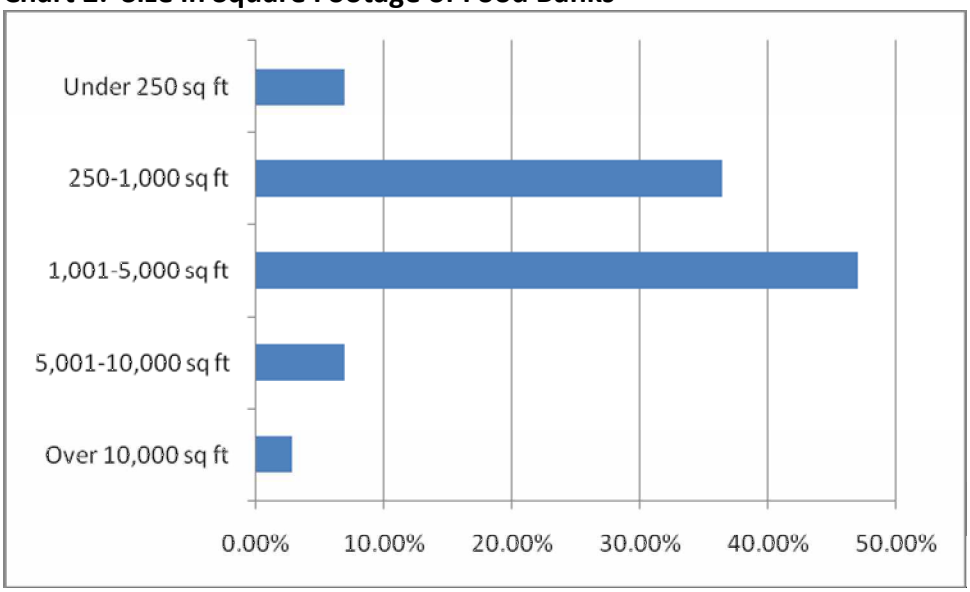
Most food banks surveyed (93%) reported that they have just one distribution site, while 7% have satellite locations.

Food banks exist in a variety of settings. Most common are independent agencies (39%), a program or center of a larger organization (24%) and inside a church (22%). A few food banks are located in community centers or other publicly owned buildings.

The majority of food banks have secure space. 37% of food banks own their facility, and another 26% lease for free or nominal cost (less than $100 per month). Many of the groups that receive free space do contribute to occupancy costs such as utilities. 70% feel confident that they will be able to stay in their current space indefinitely, while 15% hope to purchase their own building within three years. 64% report that their facility is in good or excellent condition.

Food banks vary in terms of square footage. 43% have less than 1,000 square feet of space, 47% are in the 1,001-5,000 square foot range. Just 10% have over 5,001 square feet.

Chart 2: Size in Square Footage of Food Banks



Although secure, space at many locations is insufficient. Approximately 40% of food banks report that they have inadequate space for each of the following key functions: dry storage, cold storage, food distribution, food sorting and packing, and customer lobby. Other space challenges include space for receiving donations (35% report inadequate space for this), customer intake (36%) and loading dock (31%). On the other hand, about 60% of respondents felt space was adequate for each purpose, or indicated that space for this particular purpose was not a high priority for their organization.

Organizations facing inadequate shelving, pallets, tables and cabinets fell in the 22%-32% range, with the balance reporting that what they had was adequate to meet their needs.

> ***"We have a very small food bank. It would be nice if our food bank was about twice the size. Right now it is about 25 feet long by 8 feet wide. With the shelves and fridge/freezer, our walking aisle is about two feet. Being a skinny volunteer helps!"***

Cold and Dry Storage

50% of respondents utilize a walk-in cooler, and 51% have walk-in freezers. The remaining food banks rely on upright or household refrigerators and chest or upright freezers. 26% of food banks report using 5 or more chest or upright freezers, while 9% have five or more household size refrigerators. Large walk-in coolers and freezers are a significant capacity need. 30% of food banks report needing a walk-in cooler, and 31% need a walk-in freezer, in order to meet the basic standard of comparison.

Most food banks (66%) report that they do not have additional off-site storage facilities.

Equipment

Food banks indicated what types of equipment they currently have in place, and what additional equipment they would need to meet the standard. The most significant equipment needs flagged were a small truck or cargo van (36%) and/or a sprinter truck, box truck or larger (18%), as well as scales for repacking (35%) and a scale for weighing pallets (23%).

Table 1: Equipment Needs of Food Banks

Type of Equipment	Sufficient Capacity		Insufficient Capacity	
Answer given >	*We don't need this item.*	*We have enough.*	*We need 1 more.*	*We need 2 or more.*
Hand trucks	12%	55%	25%	8%
Carts	23%	40%	17%	21%
Pallet jacks	56%	24%	19%	1%
Fork lifts	71%	10%	19%	0%
Small truck or cargo van	33%	31%	35%	1%
Sprinter, box truck or larger	66%	16%	18%	0%
Tables for repacking	15%	52%	15%	17%
Sink	21%	57%	16%	6%
Scales for repacking	27%	38%	28%	7%
Scales for weighing pallets	70%	7%	23%	0%
Other (see summary below)	55%	9%	10%	18%

When asked what other equipment is needed, respondents identified several items associated with shopping: a glass front refrigerator, store-type shelving for bread shopping, and small shopping carts for use of customers choosing food in the food bank. Some mentioned that they are using very old trucks that need repairs and/or replacement. A number of others used this space to comment that while they could use additional equipment, right now, they have no place to put it.

> ***"We would like to purchase our building and property and put on another building with adequate electrical plug-ins so that we could have a walk-in cooler and more freezers. Also, we could have a secure office area with lights so we could leave the computer at the food bank instead of hauling it back and forth. We can't purchase more items that plug in because the wiring isn't adequate."***

Technology

In terms of technology and telecommunications equipment, almost all responding food banks (96%) indicated that they have a telephone on site at their food bank. 81% have a computer, and 63% have internet access (45% high speed and 18% dial-up). 76% have a printer, and 58% have a fax machine. This survey did not solicit specific information about the quality or age of equipment.

Food

Respondents indicated what types of food and non-food items they usually distribute to customers. The variety of foods indicated was very encouraging, and the large percentages of food banks reporting that they distribute fresh and frozen foods along with shelf-stable or canned items illustrates that significant change in the types of food available (toward more perishables) has already taken place.

Table 2: Types of Food Distributed by Food Banks

Type of Food	Fresh	Frozen	Canned or shelf stable
Fruits and Vegetables	76%	68%	93%
Dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt)	86%	10%	37%
Breads, bakery items, desserts	93%	41%	12%
Meat and poultry	19%	93%	61%
Fish	11%	83%	63%
Eggs	97%	1%	11%
Peanut butter	10%	0%	95%
Cereal, grains, flour, pasta and rice	14%	2%	92%
Other: personal care, cleaning, paper products, diapers, baby food and formula	11%	1%	94%

In terms of needed items, food banks prioritized the following items (each is followed by the percentage of food banks indicating that they need more of this item):

- Fresh eggs (92%)
- Fresh breads, bakery items and desserts (91%)
- Peanut butter (90%)
- Dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt) (88%)
- Other items (personal care, cleaning, paper products, diapers, baby food and formula) (88%)
- Cereal, grains, flour, pasta and rice (85%)
- Frozen meat and poultry (77%)
- Fresh fruits and vegetables (76%)
- Frozen fish (75%)

> ***"We are most concerned with the type of food—we seem to have processed junk food snacks mostly—but that's what's left over, I guess. We really need an emphasis on staples, unsweetened fruit and low sodium vegetables."***

31.5% of food banks distribute food in prepared bags, 31.5% use a mix of prepared bags and customer choice/shopping, and 37% have converted to an all-customer choice/shopping model.

Sources of Food

Food banks receive food from a number of sources. It is important to note that for this section of the survey, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of food received from different sources. Also, some respondents did not fill out this section of the survey completely, which may distort percentages somewhat.

- Food Banks' reliance on distribution centers varies tremendously, ranging across the board from 0-100%.
- Reliance on federal food distribution programs has varied. 41.2% of respondents report that they get little or no food (0-5%) from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and another 34% receive 6-15% of their food from TEFAP. [Clarification: These figures appear to be lower than TEFAP reports and may be misleading since commodity food is not always marked as USDA but instead uses commercial labels. TEFAP audits show it annually provides 6 -12 million pounds of

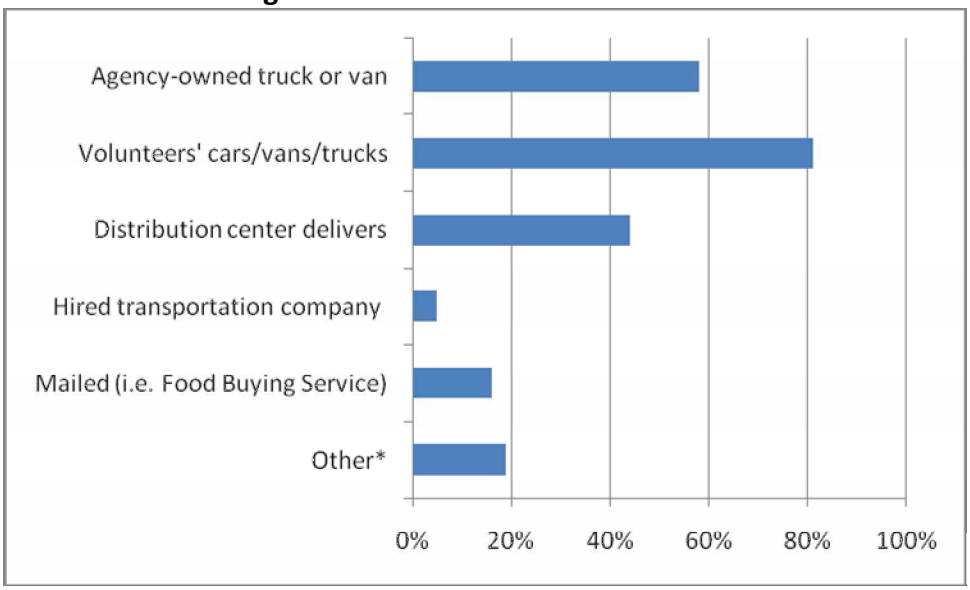
USDA food to 21 distribution centers and 500 food banks and meal providers. Food banks distributed a total of 91.1 million pounds of food from all resources in fiscal year 2007.] The U.S. Farm Bill, which was enacted into law this year, will provide TEFAP with an additional 3.7 million pounds of food per year, starting with 1.8 million pounds in 2008. The Farm Bill also reauthorizes the CSFP, which is currently available in six areas of the State. These sources are more critical in rural areas.]

- Food donations received directly from grocery stores, other food retailers, restaurants and hospitality industry make up less than 15% of food received for the majority (57%) of food banks, and just 6% of respondents report getting more than 50% of their food from these sources.
- Reliance on purchased food varied: 29% of food banks purchase over 20% of their food, 41% of food banks report that purchased food accounts for between 6-20% of their food, while another 30% have little or no resources for purchasing (in the 0-5% range). A small percentage (7%) purchase 5% or more of their food from local farmers.
- Other sources such as farmer's markets, local farmer's donations and gleaning are typically supplemental and provide 0-5% of food for the majority of respondents.

Transportation

Food banks use a variety of methods for transporting food to their agency. Most striking is the high percentage of respondents who rely on the use of volunteer's personal vehicles to retrieve food donations.

Chart 3: How Food gets to the Food Banks



*Other common modes of transporting food not listed here include transportation by a truck owned by a local coalition, use of staff members' personal vehicles, delivery by donors, borrowing or renting a truck, and use of an agency-owned trailer.

"Being in a small rural area, it is difficult for us to get donations because we don't have a lot of resources. Only one grocery store in town and we are 30 miles away

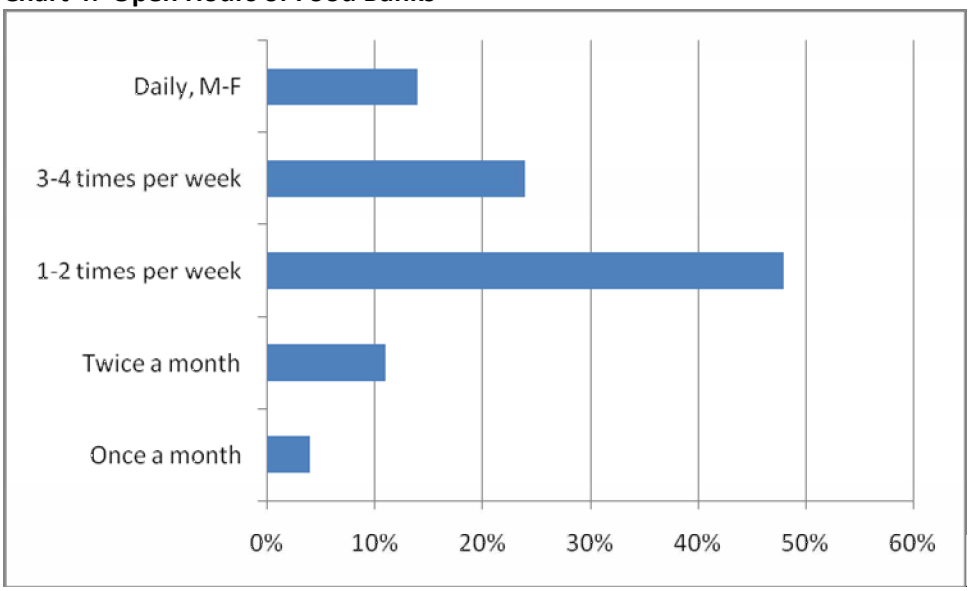
from our distribution center. With rising gas prices it is difficult for us to collect food from donors."

Structure: Hours, Staffing and Customer Transportation

Open Hours

The majority (86%) of food banks are open at least once a week, with 37% open three or more times per week. The total number of hours that agencies are open varies widely, from less than 5 hours per month (9%) at one end of the spectrum, to 30 or more hours (22%). A minority of food banks (37%) have adjusted or expanded their hours to include weekend or evening open hours. The majority (74%) felt that the number of hours they are currently open is sufficient to meet the standard.

Chart 4: Open Hours of Food Banks



In terms of frequency of visits, 59% of food banks allow customers to visit weekly or more often, while 39% limit visits to one per month and 2% allow visits less often than monthly.

Staff and Volunteers

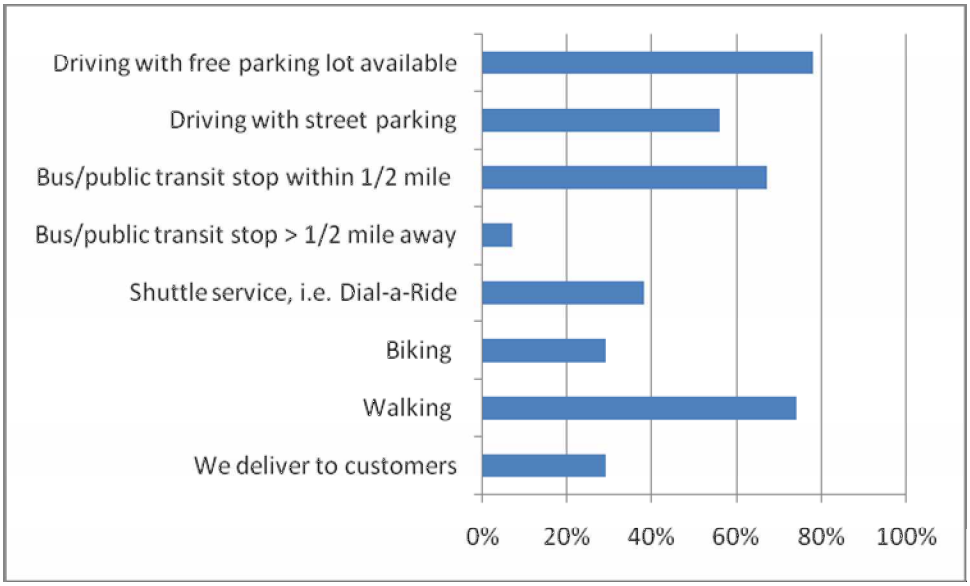
51% of food banks operate on an all-volunteer basis, and only 24% have more than 1 FTE of staff. Most food banks rely heavily on volunteer labor, with 52% reporting that they log over 200 hours of volunteer time each month. Most have a blend of "regulars" who volunteer at least weekly and more intermittent project volunteers.

Despite the growing popularity of formal volunteer programs such as community service programs, RSVP and others, only 24% of food banks report utilizing these programs to recruit 10% or more of their volunteers.

Staffing (whether paid or volunteer) appears to be a significant limitation to meeting the basic standard for about one quarter (26%) of food banks surveyed. These food banks report they would need to mobilize people to work more than 50 additional hours each month to meet the standard for all customers.

Transportation for Customers
Customers utilize a variety of transportation modes to visit food banks.

Chart 5: Transportation Options for Customers



When asked whether a substantial number of customers would need additional transportation options to be able to receive and carry home the standard amount of food, providers had mixed responses. 32% said that additional transportation options would be needed, 37% said they didn't think it was an issue, and 31% said they didn't know. We may gain additional insight on this issue from the companion customer survey.

Food Bank Priorities
Survey respondents were asked to choose just one of the following areas that they would prioritize for state investment. The following list shows the issues in order of emphasis, followed by the percentage of respondents who prioritized that issue.

- Food (65%)
- Facilities (12%)
- Equipment (8%)
- Transportation (7%)
- Staffing (5%)
- Technology (1%)
- Other (3%)

Other proposed priorities added by respondents included: fresh food/nutritious food, transportation for seniors, funds for fuel to support home delivery service, assistance with overhead costs or rent, client education and "all of the above."

> ***"We have seen an increase in clients served of more than 25% over last year. This trend looks to be a growing one. With the cost of food increasing, we will be unable to continue our standard service as funds will not stretch as far."***

"I'd love more equipment but need more space. To serve more people we need "after hours." If I had more space and more hours, I would need more staff."

Comments

A few comments offered by food bank respondents are spread throughout this report. Here is a summary of the main issues raised by respondents in the final open comment section, followed by the number of people who expressed similar concerns.

- Food (25), including the need for healthy and nutritious items, greater quantities, more protein (meat, eggs and dairy), culturally appropriate food, and food for special diets (diabetic).
- Lack of adequate facilities and space (11).
- Storage challenges (8).
- Gas prices (8).
- Equipment (7), including more refrigeration, computers, carts, equipment repair.
- Home delivery (7).
- Currently upgrading or moving to better facility (6).
- Other complementary social services (housing, job assistance, etc.) needed by clients (6).
- Need for additional staff (6).
- Transport for customers (6).
- Transportation of food to food banks (5).
- Need for better service by distribution centers (4).
- Language and cultural issues (3).
- Disaster preparedness (2).
- Childcare for customers (2).

Ideas/Suggestions offered by respondents:

- Why not contact the bigger employers such as Boeing and ask that the food banks be given right of first refusal on any trucks they are putting on the market? That business could then be given a tax write-off for the fair market value of the truck and a major headache for the food banks would be resolved.
- Have the city/county/state contract with several refrigerator repair companies by zip code to repair existing refrigerator/freezer equipment.
- Bus pass and/or gas voucher program for customers and/or staff and volunteers to pick up food donations.
- In January, we made an agreement to send our van loaded with food boxes 30 miles west of our location to reach needy who are unable to travel and that is working very well.
- Our freezer is an old train box car that has been converted to a freezer. We need a new door on it but cannot afford to repair it without impacting our ability to buy food for our approximately 500 client families each week. I wish EFAP had money that could be used to repair equipment instead of buying new. [Clarification: Equipment repairs are an allowable EFAP expenditure as well as equipment purchases.]

Tribal Food Voucher Results

Services and Facilities
Tribes within Washington State can apply for EFAP funding to support a tribal food voucher program. Tribal food voucher programs vary just as the size of tribes vary greatly. Tribes often complement their food voucher program with other anti-hunger programs. 35% run a food bank, and 30% offer other programs.

Tribal food voucher programs are often housed at the tribal office (65%), with 9% located at a health clinic, and 4% operated out of an independently owned facility. Three work in shared office space, and two programs work with customers via only the mail and telephone.

14 of the 24 programs responding (64%) work out of office space owned by the Tribe, three (14%) lease for cost, three (14%) lease for free or a nominal cost, one program works out of a home office and four programs did not specify. Condition of the space varies considerably: 32% rated the condition of their facility excellent, 23% indicated it was good, 18% fair (in need of small repairs) and 27% reported poor facility condition (in need of major repairs).

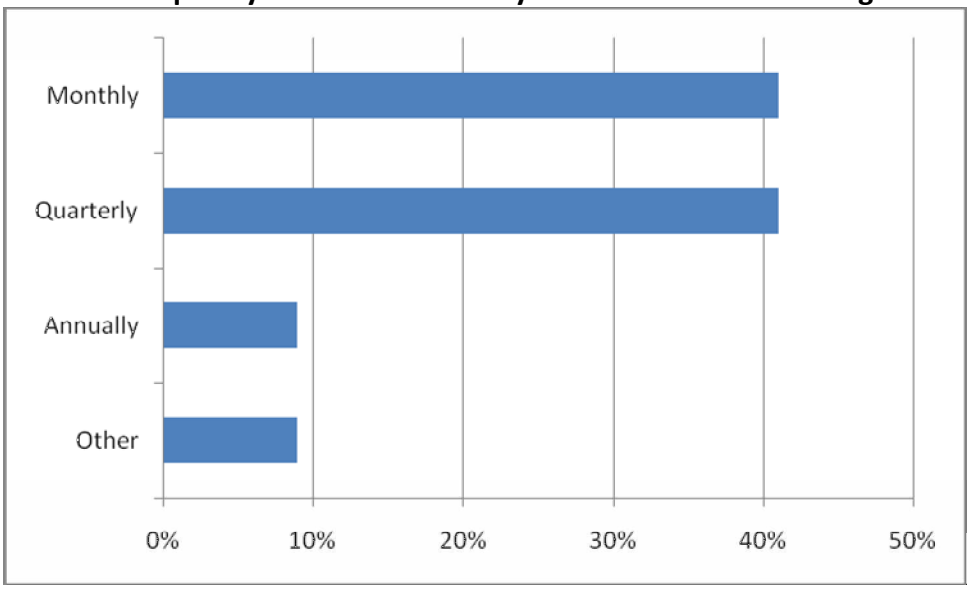
Most facilities have space available for the following key functions:
- Staff or volunteer office (85%)
- Customer lobby (95%)
- Staff and volunteer bathroom (95%)
- Customer bathroom (75%)
- Customer intake (80%)

Technology
The tribal food voucher programs surveyed all had telephones and computers, 91% have internet access (64% high speed and 27% dial-up), 96% have a printer and 86% have a fax machine.

Type of Partner Store
91% of programs surveyed report that they work with a private corporate grocery store where customers can redeem vouchers. 18% work with private, locally-owned store, and 18% work with a tribal owned store.

Accessibility
Most programs (68%) are open daily during the workweek. 4 (18%) are open 1-4 times per week, and 3 (14%) are open once a month. 12 (55%) are open at least thirty daytime, workday hours per month, while the remainder vary from 5-30 open daytime, workday hours per month. Only three programs (14%) offer evening or weekend hours. 77% felt that additional open hours would not be needed to meet all estimated prospective voucher requests, while 23% felt that additional hours would be required. 91% feel that no additional interview space would be needed to meet all demand. 23% indicated that additional staff would be necessary, while 77% felt they could meet demand with current staff and/or volunteers. The biggest need identified to meet all demand is additional funding, with 75% reporting that they would need more funding in order to feed everyone asking for a voucher.

Chart 6: Frequency of Visits Allowed by Tribal Food Voucher Programs



Tribal food voucher programs rely primarily on paid staff; with just two programs (9%) reporting that they use limited volunteer assistance. Just as the size of the tribes and the food voucher programs vary dramatically, staffing ranges from one part-time staff person to more than 4 full-time staff.

One challenge faced by tribal food voucher programs is how to cover disallowed costs incurred by customers due to grocery store failure to adequately enforce voucher limitations. 70% of programs report utilizing tribal funding to cover such costs, 10% are able to access Indian Child Welfare funding for this purpose, and 3 programs (15%) rely on other sources: victims of crime assistance, the CHR program and cash donations to their program.

Customers reach or are reached by tribal food voucher programs via various modes of transportation. Modes of access available to customers are:

- Driving with free parking lot (63%)
- Vouchers available by mail (53%)
- Bus or other public transit with a stop within ½ mile (47%)
- Walking (37%)
- Delivery to home-bound customers (32%)
- Shuttle service (16%)
- Biking (16%)
- Driving with street parking (16%)
- Bus or other public transit with a stop more than ½ mile away (5%)

24% of respondents indicated that customers need additional transportation options in order to receive and/or utilize their vouchers (shop). One program recommended bus passes, and two suggested gas vouchers to improve transportation access for customers.

18 programs report that they track the number of families they turn away each month. Seven of these programs do not turn anyone away, seven tribes report turning away 1 to 20 customers a month while four report turning away 30 to 100 per month. 75% of programs report that they would need additional

funding to go towards the value of vouchers in order to feed everyone asking for a voucher, while just 37% feel they would need additional funding to pay for disallowed costs not covered by EFAP.

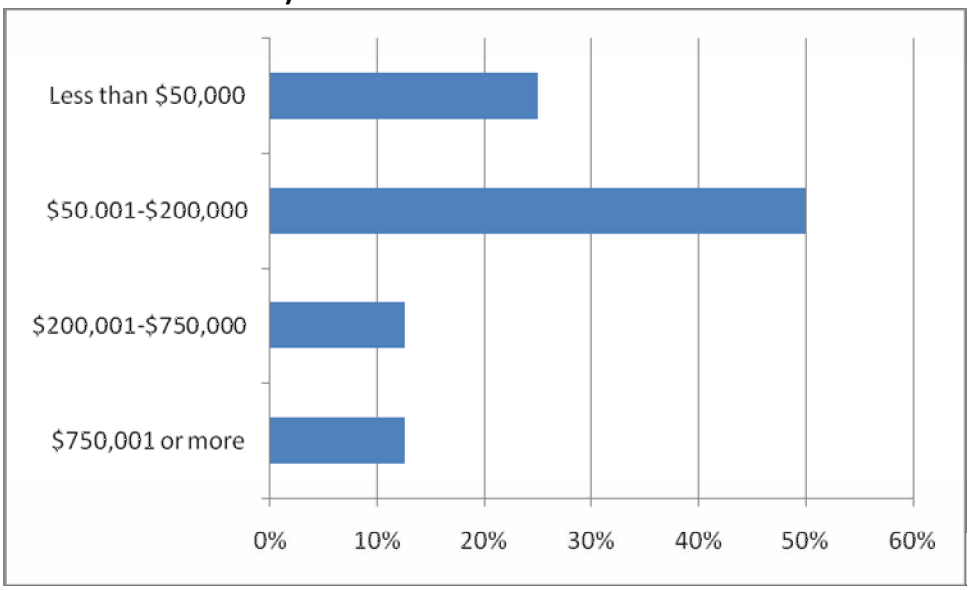
> ***"This year we had a few power outages, there were a lot more people needing food assistance. They needed food to be replaced because of spoilage. We had a busy year providing more assistance than usual. This is when we really need extra assistance funds."***

Distribution Center Results

Organizational Size and Facilities

62% of the distribution centers operate as part of a larger organization such as a Community Action Program (CAP) agency. 38% are independent agencies. The majority (75%) have annual agency budgets over $1,000,000. However, respondents' budgets for their distribution center activities vary considerably.

Chart 7: Annual Distribution Center Cash Budget (portion of agency budget dedicated to food distribution activities)



13 distribution centers surveyed (81%) distribute food from a single site. Two distribution centers have two locations, and one has three or more locations. Seven distribution centers lease their main location for cost, three lease for free or a nominal cost and five own their own facility. The three organizations with satellite facilities lease these for cost. Nine agencies report that they believe they can stay in their current facility indefinitely, and only two feel they will likely have to move within one to two years. Two organizations that currently rent hope to purchase their own building within three years.

One half of distribution centers have less than 5,000 square feet of space and the other half have more than 5,000 square feet. The condition of these organizations' main facilities varies. While the majority report that their facility is in excellent or good condition, four distribution centers rate their facility condition as fair (needs minor repairs) and two consider their facility condition poor (need major repairs). Repairs needed range from roofing and structural repairs to equipment maintenance (i.e. walk-in coolers and freezers).

> ***"We need a larger building. We are in the 'bread basket' of the state for food donations. With a larger, ground level facility we could accept and move more food not only to our food banks but to share with others."***

Distribution centers were asked to comment on the types of space they have available and how well it meets their needs. The table below shows their responses regarding several key types of space. The highest space needs for the group appear to be space for food sorting and packing and office space, with a majority (57% for each) reporting that their current space is insufficient.

Table 3: Storage and Space Capacity of Distribution Centers

Type of Space	**Sufficient Capacity**		**Insufficient Capacity**	
Answer given >	*We have adequate space for this purpose.*	*We don't have space for this, but it is a low priority/we don't need it.*	*We have space, but it is not adequate.*	*We don't have space for this, and it is a high priority to add space for this purpose.*
Dry storage	63%	0%	31%	6%
Cold storage	60%	0%	33%	7%
Food sorting/packing/repacking	44%	0%	44%	13%
Receiving donations	88%	0%	13%	0%
Staff/volunteer office	44%	0%	38%	19%
Staff/volunteer lounge or break area	40%	27%	27%	7%
Customer lobby	38%	38%	25%	0%
Staff/volunteer bathroom	50%	13%	31%	6%
Loading dock	47%	27%	20%	7%

All of the distribution centers report having walk-in coolers and freezers. However, some are in need of additional units.

Equipment

Distribution centers have varied equipment needs. The following list shows the top equipment needs identified by survey respondents, followed by the percentage of respondents who indicated that they need at least one more of this item.

- Tables for repacking (68%, 42% need two or more)
- Refrigerated truck (67%)
- Scales for weighing pallets (67%)
- Forklifts (64%)

Food Types and Sources

Distribution centers were asked to indicate which foods they source directly (as opposed to receiving from another distribution center), and also which foods they need more of. All source eggs, peanut butter, some combination of cereal/grains/rice/flour/pasta, and "other" (personal care, cleaning, paper products, diapers, baby food and formula). 91% source frozen meats, 80% source fresh fruits and vegetables, and 78% source dairy. The types of food needed most (followed by the percentage of respondents indicating need in this area) are a very similar list:

- Peanut butter (100%)
- Eggs (100%)
- Cereal, grains, flour, rice, pasta (100%)
- Other: personal care, cleaning, paper products, diapers, baby food and formula (100%)
- Fresh breads, bakery items and desserts (100%)

- Fresh fruits and vegetables (93%)
- Frozen meat and poultry (93%)
- Frozen fish (90%)
- Fresh dairy products (87%)

For purposes of this analysis, a food source is considered significant if the distribution center receives 15% or more of its food from that source. The most significant sources of food for the respondents are:

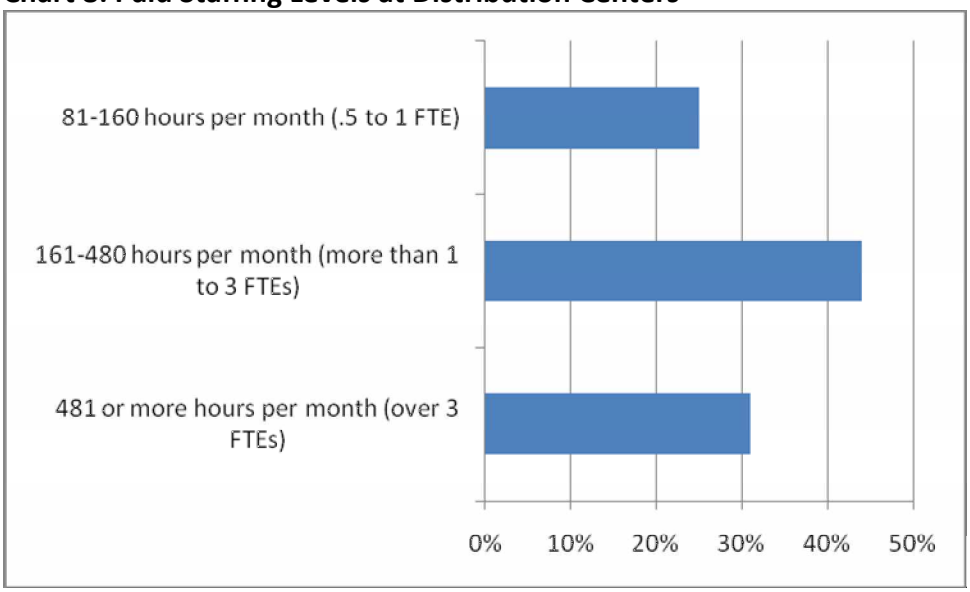
- Donations directly from grocery stores, retailers and restaurants (significant source for 11 distribution centers).
- America's Second Harvest Network: Food Lifeline, Second Harvest Inland Northwest, Oregon Food Bank (significant for eight distribution centers).
- Washington's Independent Food Bank Network: Northwest Harvest, Emergency Food Network, Grays Harbor Pacific Counties Distribution Center (significant for six distribution centers).
- Food drives in schools, churches, etc. (significant for four distribution centers).

Each distribution center has a different mix of food sources. Two receive a significant amount of their food (75-80% in one case and 56-60% in the other) donated directly from processors, manufacturers, packers, labelers and other industry/wholesale sources. Distribution centers indicated that they depend on TEFAP for anywhere from 0-35% of their food, with 43% receiving 5-10% of their food through TEFAP. Four distribution centers purchase 11-20% of their food, while to rest do little or no purchasing (0-5%). Two distribution centers harvest 6-15% of their food from a farm or orchard that they own, and four rely on donations from farmers, p-patches and home gardeners (with one distribution center estimating that 26-30% of their food comes from these donations). One agency receives 5-10% of its food from gleaning.

Staff and Volunteers

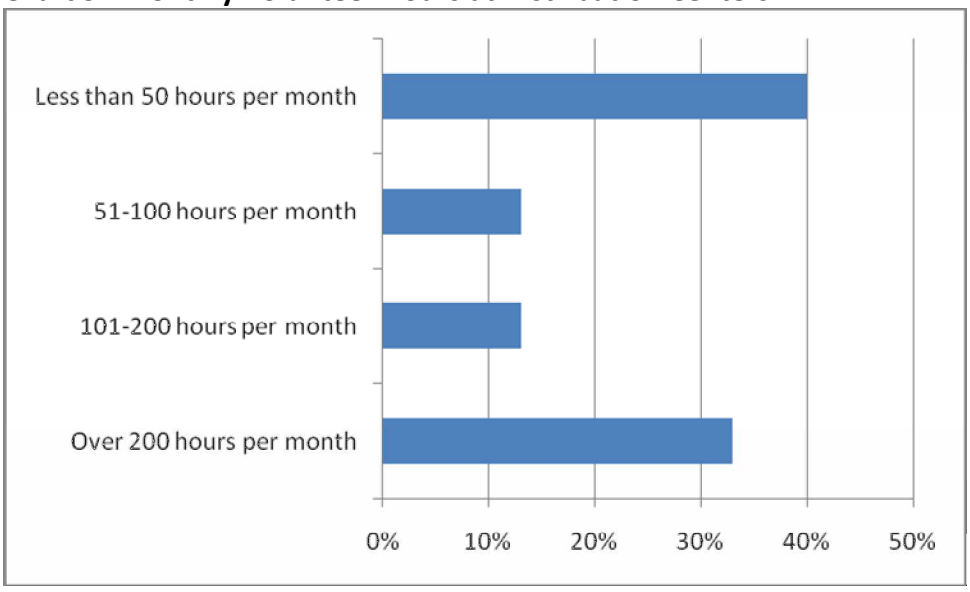
Most distribution centers (8) have a relatively small staff (0-4 full time people). One agency reported having ten full-time staff and two large agencies indicated they have twenty or more full-time staff.

Chart 8: Paid Staffing Levels at Distribution Centers



Distribution centers also utilize volunteers to varying degrees.

Chart 9: Monthly Volunteer Hours at Distribution Centers



Distribution centers were somewhat more likely than food banks to access volunteers through formal volunteer programs in the community. 75% utilize these programs somewhat, and 31% find 10% or more of their volunteers through such programs.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Emergency Food System

The data presented above is open for interpretation, and experts in the field may draw different conclusions. The following are a few observations of the consultant regarding promising areas for attention and/or investment.

Refrigerator and freezer upgrades needed: Many food banks still rely on multiple household model refrigerators and freezers (page 5). It would be worthwhile to compare the operating costs of these individual cold storage units versus a walk-in model. It is likely that there is a breakpoint where storage capacity, energy costs, accessibility or other factors indicate that it is cost-effective (as well as environmentally friendly) to upgrade to a walk-in model cooler or freezer. It's likely that these food banks utilize older household models because they are unable to meet the capital cost of installing a walk-in, and this might be a promising area for public or philanthropic investment.

Additional storage is a need for many food banks: Most food banks report that space is at a premium for them (page 5) and that lack of space limits their ability to accept donations. They also indicate that they do not have additional off-site storage facilities (page 5). Given the seasonal fluctuations in demand for food storage and the small size of most food banks surveyed, this could indicate an unmet need that could be met on a collective or regional basis.

Further assessment and investment indicated in the area of technology: Although the survey revealed that most food banks have achieved a basic level of technology infrastructure (computer, telephone, fax machines, printer), the survey did not solicit specific information about the quality or age of equipment. During the "A Fork in the Road" inquiry process, it was common for food bank volunteers to report having no equipment or inadequate hardware and software on site, leading them to complete reports and other food bank projects at home. This might be an area for further inquiry or investment. For example, a basic level of technology capacity outlined, and groups who do not meet this baseline invited to apply for a special funding round.

Transportation of food to the food banks remains a challenge: Trucks and/or vans were among the top equipment needs cited by food banks (page 6), and a number commented that they needed more refrigerated transportation. This seems to underscore the importance of supporting creative and collaborative ways to meet transportation challenges, such as the ideas outlined in the "Fork in the Road" report.

Food banks lean on volunteers to transport food: The high reliance on volunteers to transport food in personal vehicles (page 8) is a potential vulnerability for the emergency food system. It is likely that many volunteers provide this support free of charge. As fuel prices have increased to unprecedented levels, pressure to reimburse volunteers for mileage will increase. A few respondents commented that it was already becoming more difficult to find volunteers willing to pick up food in their own vehicles. It would be useful to conduct further inquiry regarding how this works and whether volunteers commonly receive mileage reimbursement for gasoline and/or vehicle wear and tear.

Food vouchers allow for serving customers by mail: More than half of tribal food voucher programs reported that they are able to mail vouchers to customers (page 13), saving the trouble and expense of transportation to all visits. While it may be advisable to retain some in-person visits (i.e. an initial intake/enrollment interview), it may be worthwhile for more tribes to consider adopting policies that

allow for mail delivery of vouchers. This would help to overcome transportation barriers for customers, many of whom live in rural areas and may be confronting rising fuel costs.

We know what type of food is most needed: There is agreement among food banks and distribution centers regarding the most needed additional food types (page 7 and page 16). This list should be widely publicized, especially at this time of heightened public awareness of the high cost of food and need of food banks to serve more people, so that additional donations generated meet the most critical needs.

Food banks prioritize food: A strong message came through in the comments and in the question regarding priorities (page 11): people on the ground in the emergency food system feel that their most urgent need is food. If forced to choose, they are willing to make do with the facilities, equipment and other tools they have, and channel resources toward this most basic need.

Investing in emergency food has a multiplier effect: This survey highlights several important capacity needs in the emergency food system. However, it is also important to recognize the system's strengths and the amazing leverage generated through volunteers, in-kind space provided by churches and community groups, food drives and donations, and other contributions to the system. The survey documents this incredible support of the system, which confirms the degree to which the emergency food system's matching resources have a multiplier effect on state and philanthropic funds invested in its structure. Hopefully, this report can be shared with legislators and funders to clearly illustrate to them that their investment in a basic level of funding for emergency food yields broader benefits—building collective capacity to work together, encouraging volunteerism, preventing food waste, and distributing resources to those in need in communities across Washington.